DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 139 311 HE 008 883

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TITLE Decentralized University Studies in Economics and English/The DUNE Project--An Evaluative Project Under Sub-Project III, an Alternative Form of Distribution for Higher Education. Educational Development 1976:3.
INSTITUTION National Swedish Board of Universities and Colleges, Stockholm. Research and Development Unit.
REPORT NO ISSN-0346-6175
PUB DATE 76
NOTE 7p.
AVAILABLE FROM National Swedish Board of Universities and Colleges, R. & D. Unit, P.O. Box 16334, S-103 26 Stockholm, Sweden

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Students; *Cooperative Programs; *Delivery Systems; *Educational Alternatives; Educational Supply; *Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Interinstitutional Cooperation; Nontraditional Students; Older Adults; School Community Relationship; Student Evaluation of Teacher Performance; *Teaching Methods; University Extension
IDENTIFIERS Linkoping University; Project DUNE; *Sweden; University of Lund (Sweden)

ABSTRACT

A teaching system practiced in the Swedish DUNE project, Subproject III, offered an alternative to the usual concentrated form of higher education. An attempt was made to solve the problem of educational distribution by cooperative efforts among municipal authorities, adult education associations, and two postsecondary establishments, the university of Lund and Linkoping College. The subjects selected were English and economics, and teaching was conducted at half speed. The target group included employed persons, the elderly, and undereducated persons. Lessons are conducted in discussion groups and included weekend courses, self-instructional materials, video tapes, and language laboratories. This report reviews briefly the participants' backgrounds, the role of the teacher, student motivation and plans, student assessment of teachers, and assessment of the intensive courses. The results indicate that this is a realistic, alternative delivery system. (LBH)

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Educational Development

ED139311

Completed project

1976:3

Project title: Decentralized university studies in economics and English/the DUNE project – an evaluative project under sub-project III, an alternative form of distribution for higher education

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Background and purpose

In 1970 the Swedish Government instructed the Office of the Chancellor of the Swedish Universities (UKÄ) to plan an experimental scheme for the distribution of higher education. This scheme was to comprise three sub-projects whose underlying idea was to make education more accessible to participants, both geographically and pedagogically speaking. In 1973 the 1968 Education Commission (U 68) observed that, out of a total of some 145,000 post-secondary students in the country as a whole, 120,000 were distributed between no more than five different places. The experimental scheme lasted for three years, but the evaluation presented here refers to the first two only (1972/73 and 1973/74).

In sub-project III an attempt was made to solve the problem of educational distribution by the following means. The project was based on collaboration between municipal authorities, adult education associations and two post-secondary establishments, namely the University of Lund and what was then known as Linköping College. English was the subject selected in the Jönköping, Motala and Finspång areas, economics in Kristianstad, Kalmar and Ystad. Teaching was conducted at half speed.

The target group mainly comprised gainfully employed persons, but it also included elderly and "under-educated" persons. Lessons were taken in discussion groups ("study circles") led by local teachers; local recruitment formed part of the original plan but could not be consistently applied. Weekend courses/intensive courses were also included, and use was made of technical aids such as self-instructional materials, video tapes (economics) and language laboratories.

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The aim was to carry out a broad evaluation of activities and also to find out whether the combination of pedagogical and organizational measures described above could present a realistic alternative to instruction provided at the universities themselves.

Arrangement and conduct

Data were collected during the autumn term 1972, the spring term 1973, the autumn term 1973 and the spring term 1974. During the spring terms, the students' opinions of the teaching were solicited by means of questionnaires, interviews and personal letters. The response frequency was about 75 per cent, the greatest uncertainty being in the smallest areas.

The main factors investigated were the participants' educational background (formal and "informal"), their motives for studying, their educational plans, their study input, the difficulties they encountered in their studies, their academic results and the assessments made of them by their teachers.

One of the difficulties surrounding evaluation was that the intentions of sub-project III were not fully realized. The system of pre-produced material, study circles, video tapes and a small number of intensive courses was incompletely practised in most areas. Teachers and course leaders exercized their liberty of altering some of the conditions applying to the project. This was partly because the administration of the project became more cumbersome than had been expected. Among other things it proved difficult to integrate this teaching with the service merits accruing from the teachers' other duties. Conventional classroom teaching predominated. The usual number of students per group was between 8 and 15 instead of the anticipated 25, which however was the initial number of students per group in Jönköping and Motala.

Participants' backgrounds

Eighty-five per cent of the participants were over 25. Many of them had attended upper secondary school and studied at university, despite the focus on the undereducated. Eighty-five per cent were gainfully employed, and the occupational structure resembled that usually encountered in extramural university education. The largest occupational groups comprised teachers, engineers, office workers and housewives (many of whom were former office workers). The latest period of education was often quite recent, except in the case of the Ystad and Jönköping groups. Moreover, the students were of the opinion that there existed good opportunities of "education" without official courses. No less than 80 per cent considered that they had previous improved their knowledge somewhat without acquiring any documented merits or certificates.

The role of the teacher

One interesting point which is not very often emphasized in evaluations of higher education concerns the teacher's demand for participation in the production of teaching materials and in the design of qualified commentaries on the pre-produced material. This demand is probably prompted by pedagogical aspirations on the part of the institutions which accept experimental activities, and also by the internal dynamics of those institutions. In a survey of external and non-traditional university teaching (André, 1974 b), mention is made of the scepticism which teachers often display towards pre-produced material. This problem is probably deepened by material of this kind not always being found sufficiently adapted to the new student groups – mostly elderly persons – now gaining admission to universities.

The dependence of evaluation on the two subjects included in the experimental scheme

The subjects differ in their degree of abstraction and in their applicability to the work in hand. Few people have jobs to which a knowledge of economics is directly applicable. Usually the subject formed part of a wider effort by the student to enhance his competitive status – with or without a complete degree in the economics and law sector. Our particular group of students included many persons with previous knowledge acquired, for example, by studying business economics, but other students had no previous knowledge at all. The link between studies and work came more naturally to the students taking English, whether they were junior teachers or engineers faced with a technical translation.

Some of the mathematical elements of economics presented serious problems. Equations were difficult, but so too were more illustrated statistical items such as column charts and graphs. Results in English were so good that no sector was weak enough to be considered problematical.

A soft start for untrained and the under-educated

A majority of the participants were in favour of a soft start including refurbishing of their previous knowledge, the distribution of set literature well in advance and advice on study techniques. Our student group was relatively well-educated and the above proposals would seem more appropriate to students with less of an educational background. However, international surveys invariably show that extramural university students have a host of formal and informal educational qualifications. The students of economics who were mainly interested in improving their grasp of economic affairs as reflected in leading articles and elsewhere in the press could not be expected to put the same amount of effort into their studies as those who were aiming at a degree.

The participants' motives for studying

Two-thirds of the students thought that their most important reason for studying was a desire to *improve their present work situation.* The SAMSUS report (1969) on extramural education mentions that 80 per cent of male extramural university students wish to improve their qualifications or change professions. The corresponding figure for women was 65 per cent.

No differences of motive appeared when we divided the participants up into two age groups, viz 20–40 and 40–60. Nor did any differences result from a division into occupational groups. Professional motives did not predominate over general motives in any of the twelve student groups investigated. However, these rough categories do not convey the entire truth. A new division into "competitive status", "general education" and "wider education" revealed the following. Students often make a wide effort to improve their competitive status. If we view the choice of subject in relation to occupation and future ambitions, we find that education has the effect of enhancing competitive status. Men are particularly anxious to improve their knowledge so as to keep ahead of younger and more dynamic colleagues. The more personal interviews revealed that housewives wanted to raise their self-esteem by showing their husbands that they were equal to higher studies. We also met a number of persons who regarded education as their last chance of getting out of a rut. Unfortunately the alternatives which the questionnaires provided on the subject of motives did not make it possible to elicit such delicate and realistic motives for studying.

Study effort and educational plans

Only 10 per cent of the participants were aiming at a degree. There were great differences between the subjects as regards study time. Seventy-five per cent of the students of economics put in less than 10 hours a week. About 80 per cent of the English students did 15 hours' reading or more every week. The latter is a heavy input, bearing in mind that the students have full-time jobs and are studying at half speed. Study effort is probably a major determinant of results, but of course the level of previous knowledge – which was very high during the first year – is also very important.

Results

The participants' English results were very good, better in fact than those of the full-time students. Part of this success, however, can be put down to a high standard of previous knowledge, particularly concerning grammar. Pronunciation, which is usually a major stumbling block, did not present any problems at all. More than half the students gained a distinction for this part of the course, which says a great deal concerning their initial standard of proficiency in the language, thanks to previous use of it with or without formal studies. The Finspång group did not do as well as the Motala-Jönköping group, but 65 per cent of the participants came within "realistic range" of the 20-point level, i.e. they were capable of attaining this level with a moderate effort.

It is less easy to generalize concering students of economics, but their results were inferior to those obtained by the English students. The descriptive, less mathematical side of the subject presented no difficulties. The largest number of students failed in part IV, "Economic Policy". Only 17 per cent of the students in the Ystad-Kalmar group passed part IV at their first attempt.

In view of the aptitude of these students where economic or technical studies (familiarty with mathematics) were concerned, difficulties can be expected with groups of inferior initial ability.

Part of the reason for the inferior results obtained by the students of economics is probably that not all of them were concerned to score the full number of points within the allotted time. Few of them had definite educational plans, which could mean that they studied more out of personal interest than because they were really obliged to do so for occupational reasons.

Assessment of the intensive coruses

The courses have been very well received. The professional teachers and the long lessons were appreciated. Contact has been good between the participants themselves, but there has been criticism of the conventional working methods and the somewhat authoritarian teachers. There has been little group work or discussion, and the teachers have seldom had different opinions from the "home teachers". There has hardly been any critical discussion concerning the actual subject. Thus the academic ideals of analysis, criticism, discussion and creativity have not been very much in evidence. The participants have regarded themselves more as university students than as professional people, and this has affected their assessment of the teaching. A focus on these viewpoints does not attract less support than a link-up with labour market conditions and the students' occupational circumstances.

One problem is that, the smaller the locality, the less likelihood there is of finding a teacher who can carry out this kind of analysis of his own subject. Students have

also reported that contacts with research activities at the institution have been few and far between.

Student assessments of teachers

The participants assessed their teachers on the basis of a number of minimum requirements identified in the BLL project (1972). Two additional requirements emerged. One of them is that students desire *active steering* by the teacher. The other – a common demand among adult students – is for students to be enabled to take part in discussions and work in small groups. The teachers were not keen on the study circle approach to teaching.

Concluding remarks

Economic and rational decisions are not the only motives which induce adults to study. Their plans reflect their individual personalities as well. Often they have had occasion to consider their own present and future position in life. They appear to be looking for factual and psychological starting points. The psychological "game" which takes place before, during and after a course of education often disappears in evaluations. It is bound up with greater self-esteem, willpower and the sense that life has acquired more meaning. One is always liable to overemphasize explanations delivered in the terminology of one's own subject. We are predisposed to employ broad pedagogical concepts because we know by experience that they have a predictive value, whereas a sociological or psychological explanation might have been more attuned to reality as experienced in a small community.

The teaching system practised in sub-project III is *one* realistic alternative to the extremely concentrated form of higher education. In the majority of localities of this size, there is probably an enormous need for further education.

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1976-11-30
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